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Effects of atomic radiation

Letter dated 10 July 2009 from the Chairman of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour, as Chairman of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, and in consultation with the officers of the Committee, to inform you of the recent activities of the Committee. This is in lieu of the usual report of the Committee, owing to the unavoidable and necessary postponement of the fifty-seventh session.

Because of an unforeseen serious personal crisis for the Secretary of the Committee, necessitating extended periods of leave between October 2008 and April 2009, work was significantly hindered on arranging documents for delivery at the fifty-seventh session of the Committee, originally scheduled from 25 to 29 May 2009. The officers of the Committee considered options for the best way to proceed, taking into account the expectations of the General Assembly, the possibility and effectiveness of convening a session later in 2009, the existing backlog of work for the secretariat and the difficulties that the United Nations Environment Programme would have had in providing a temporary replacement for the Secretary of the Committee. As a result, it was concluded that the fifty-seventh session should be rescheduled for the period from 19 to 23 April 2010. The representatives of States members and observers (international organizations and the six countries that have expressed an interest in becoming members of the Committee) were notified accordingly.

The officers have taken steps to mitigate the consequences of this unavoidable measure. I should like to inform the Assembly of the present status and future plans regarding matters raised in the relevant paragraphs of General Assembly resolution 63/89.

* A/64/150.

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Assessment and review of effects of ionizing radiation (paras. 5 and 6)

To help recover lost time in preparing documents for the rescheduled fifty-seventh session in 2010, the officers of the Committee have requested the secretariat to take action in line with the longer-term strategic plan and programme of work agreed by the Committee at its fifty-sixth session (see A/63/46, sect. III) and endorsed by the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. Accordingly, the secretariat has been making arrangements to convene specialized expert group meetings to review relevant material and has been engaging consultants for the development of manuscripts.

Data collection and cooperation with other bodies (paras. 8, 9 and 11)

With a view to streamlining the collection of data on radiation exposure and avoiding duplication of efforts, the secretariat is reviewing lessons identified from recent Committee assessments and from other data collection initiatives and mechanisms. It is convening expert group meetings in the second half of 2009 to address the future collection of data relating to public, occupational and medical patient exposures. The meetings will involve the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the European Union.

Staffing and resources (paras. 13, 15 and 16)

It is an inescapable conclusion that the current situation, resulting in the postponement of the fifty-seventh session, has been considerably complicated by the continued reliance on a single post at the professional level in the Committee secretariat.

Hopefully, given that the matter has been raised repeatedly for nearly a decade by the Committee in its annual reports, relief from reliance on a single post at the professional level may finally be in sight. I note that an additional profes ional post, at the P-4 level, was included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2010–2011 (see A/64/6 (Sect. 14)) through redeployed resources within Section 14 (Environment) in line with the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/478). I sincerely hope that the issue may finally be resolved in the near future.

Aspirants to membership of the Scientific Committee (paras. 14 and 17)

The report of the Secretary-General (A/63/478) contains an annex on the views of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation on membership, staffing and financing as expressed in consultations held during its fifty-sixth session (10-18 July 2008).

In the Committee efforts to develop detailed, objective and transparent criteria to be applied equitably to current and future members alike, a paper will be circulated among the representatives of the 21 States members of the Committee so that discussions can be facilitated and concluded at the fifty-seventh session, now scheduled from 19 to 23 April 2010. It is important that the paper be finalized by the representatives in joint and open debate. The outcome will then be submitted to the General Assembly.

Finally, I should like to state that the Secretary of the Committee is making every effort to recover from the difficult situation, as well as striving to complete the issuance, as sales publications, of the 2006 and 2008 Committee full reports with scientific annexes. Taken together with the mitigating actions now instituted, I believe that this will ensure that a full year will not be lost for the work of the Committee.

(Signed) Norman E. **Gentner**
Chairman
United Nations Scientific Committee on the
Effects of Atomic Radiation